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COUNCIL RESPONDS TO STUDY COMMITTEE'S PRELIMINARY REPORT

Glen Ellen, CA, April 6. Following is the text of a statement issued by the National Council of Affirmation in response to the preliminary recommendation of the Committee to Study Homosexuality of the United Methodist Church.

"We are dismayed that more than two years of work by the Committee to Study Homosexuality has produced so little progress toward the greater inclusiveness mandated by the Gospel. For a community whose lives have been so consistently trivialized and whose needs are so frequently ignored, nothing less than an unqualified affirmation and invitation to full participation in all aspects of church life is acceptable. Committee members may compromise their opinions in the hope of gaining approval for a recommendation. Lesbians, gay men and bisexual persons have learned the hard lesson of the closet that compromising our identity is too high a price to pay.

"The recommendation of the Study Committee ignores a clear consensus in the scientific disciplines that same-sex orientation represents a non-pathological variation in the range of human sexual behavior. The fact that a few self-styled 'experts' can be found to represent long-discredited views does not change this reality. In this context, Biblical passages treated by some as explicit prohibitions against same-sex loving relationships should be given the same credibility as passages that have been said to support white supremacy, forbid people to wear garments made of mixed fabrics, condemn association with menstruating women and prohibit the ordination of women.

"The fallacy of the study approach to homosexuality is well illustrated by the committee's recommendation. Continuing failure by the church to 'come to itself' on this issue has much less to do with a lack of information than with the blinders of homophobia and heterosexism. We urge the General Council on Ministries (GCOM) to reject the study committee's qualified elimination of negative language in the Social Principles statement. In its place, the GCOM should recommend that the General Conference simply delete language describing 'homosexual practice' as 'incompatible with Christian teaching' and eliminate all other provisions of the Discipline that limit participation by gay men, lesbians and bisexual persons. Furthermore, we call upon all United Methodists of goodwill to become reconciled with gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the only way possible--by getting to know us, sharing stories and valuing experiences."

ABOUT THE ENCLOSED QUESTIONNAIRE

Gary Comstock, Professor of Religion at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, requested that we distribute this questionnaire at his expense. Council members gave their approval, and Mr. Comstock is paying all additional expenses in sending it out. We hope that many of our readers will respond.

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SAVE THE DATES!

The Fall Gathering will be held on September 20, 21 and 22 in Atlanta, GA. No details were available at press time--there will be a special mailing with reservation form and complete schedule in the near future.

BY:

AN UNCOMMON FELLOWSHIP

REFLECTIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH

Come out, come out wherever you are. Do you have something to say to the Church about your spiritual journey to inclusiveness? As part of our witness to the 1992 General Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, National Affirmation will be publishing a devotional booklet with prayers, poems, songs, stories and other forms of creative expression exploring a variety of themes around building a truly inclusive community.

It is our hope that the booklet will embrace a variety of perspectives and religious expressions. All submissions must be 200 words or less and use inclusive language. Anonymous contributions are acceptable. The deadline for submitting material for the booklet is Nov. 15, 1991.

For more information, send your name and address to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204.



AN URGENT CALL FOR LETTERS

Members of the General Council on Ministries Committee to Study Homosexuality are being deluged with letters attacking their decision to change the language of the Social Principles regarding "the incompatibility of homosexuality with Christian teachings."

The Committee's proposed substitution argues that the lack of consensus in the relevant disciplines means that there can be no specific prohibition against homosexuality.

Write to the General Council on Ministries and indicate your support for this or even stronger language that would be more fully inclusive of lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

Send your letters to: The GCOM Study Committee on Homosexuality, 601 W. River-view, Dayton, OH 45406.



UNDERSTANDING BISEXUAL CONCERNS

Although our name was changed to Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns back in January, very little has been said about the concerns of those who are bisexual. Just as there is a difference of opinion among authors about various aspects of gay life, no single author can portray the full range of bisexual expression. As a start in our study of bisexuality, we have chosen the following articles as representative of bisexual voices within our organization.

SPEAKING OUT: BI ANY OTHER NAME...

A funny thing happened to me the other day on my way to work. A friend of mine decided to "come out." Now, in this city (San Francisco) where coming out stories are more plentiful than rain, bursting forth from the closet in itself is not exactly an unusual occurrence. It happens almost as often as changes in the weather.

What made this incident unusual was that the friend who came out to me was already an openly gay man. As a matter of fact, we had come out the first time together. We had marched in the same Gay Pride Parades and boogied at the same clubs. And now it seemed I didn't know him as well as I thought. At last he confessed it all--he was a bisexual!

My reaction was instantaneous. I went into denial. "No," I cried, "tell me it ain't so!" In response to his stubborn persistence, I turned to bargaining: "OK, so you think you're a bisexual, huh? Let's just wait and see. I mean, you're not going to act on this, are you?"

It was no use. He was unrepentant. I wept. I raged. When all else failed I tried manipulation. "Listen," I said with a tear in my eye and a quivering lip, "I once was betrayed by a bisexual." It didn't work. I was dealing with a self-avowed, practicing bisexual!...

OK, I admit it. The story you have just read is pure fiction. It is no more than the ravings of an overactive imagination. What is true is that on a fairly regular basis I am beginning to hear of more and more bisexual men and women coming out of the closet to which they have been consigned by gays and non-gays alike. They are talking about their experiences

and insisting on recognition as part of the continuum of sexual orientation and expression. It is time that Affirmation as well as the larger Church began to listen to these voices.

Several months ago after painful and lengthy discussion, the Affirmation National Council decided to change the official name of the national organization to Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns, Inc.

This was not an easy decision, but a necessary one, the Council ultimately decided.

The Affirmation Council was aware of the fact that National Affirmation was originally engendered as a response to the need for a "safe place" where lesbians and gay men could gather to affirm their identities in the midst of communities and churches that afforded no such space. The changing of the official name of the organization is a recognition in part of how far we have come as a community in creating this safe space.

The Affirmation Council also discussed the anecdotal "evidence" often presented in lesbian and gay communities wherein a man or woman will claim that they are "bisexual" as a tentative step towards coming out of the closet as an openly gay or lesbian person. Such stories were juxtaposed by the clear witness of persons within Affirmation who have offered their gifts and talents over the years as openly bisexual people.

And so we have changed our name to embrace the experiences of our brothers and sisters who are alienated from the Church because of sexual or affectional orientation. It is the type of decision "that separates the run-of-the mill queens from the snap-dragon divas" as a non-fictional friend of mine once said. To put it another way, perhaps this decision to expand our circle is yet another sign of the Spirit of the Holy One at work in our midst.

In any case our work has just begun. Prejudice is only slowly replaced by shared experiences and common realities. We are fortunate in that we have already been blessed by the presence of courageous witnesses among us. Who knows how far our circle will eventually expand? I thought I heard Jesus say it would be alright if we changed our name...

Anon.

MYTHS/REALITIES OF BISEXUALITY

by Sharon Forman Sumpter

Sexuality runs along a continuum. It is not a static "thing" but rather a process that can flow, changing throughout our lifetime. Bisexuality falls along this continuum. As Boston bisexual activist Robyn Ochs says, bisexuality is the "potential for being sexually and/or romantically involved with members of either gender."

It is important to remember that bisexual, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual are labels created by a homophobic, biphobic, heterosexist society to separate and alienate us from each other. We are all unique; we don't fit into neat little categories. We sometimes need to use these labels for political reasons and to increase our visibilities. Our sexual esteem is facilitated by acknowledging and accepting the differences and seeing the beauty of our diversity.

MYTH: Bisexuals are in "transition" or "going through a stage."

TRUTH: Some people go through a transitional period of bisexuality on their way to adopting a lesbian/gay or heterosexual identity. For many others, bisexuality remains a long-term orientation. Indeed, we are finding that homosexuality may be a transitional phase in the coming-out process for bisexual people.

MYTH: Bisexuals are confused about their sexuality.

TRUTH: It is natural for both bisexuals and gays to go through a period of confusion in the coming-out process. When you are an oppressed people and are constantly told that you don't exist, confusion is an appropriate reaction until you come out to yourself and find a supportive environment.

MYTH: Bisexuals are denying their lesbianism or gayness.

TRUTH: Bisexuality is a legitimate sexual orientation which incorporates gayness. [Many] bisexuals consider themselves part of the generic term "gay." Many are quite active in the gay community, both socially and politically. Some of us use terms such as "bisexual lesbian" to increase our visibility on both issues.

MYTH: Bisexuals are equally attracted to both sexes.

continued next page

MYTHS/REALITIES *from page three*

TRUTH: [Some are; but many] tend to favor either the same or the opposite sex, while recognizing their attraction to both genders.

MYTH: Bisexuals are promiscuous/swingers.

TRUTH: Bisexual people have a range of sexual behaviors. Some have multiple partners; some have one partner; some go through partnerless periods. Promiscuity is no more prevalent in the bisexual population than in other groups of people.

MYTH: Bisexual means having concurrent lovers of both genders.

TRUTH: Bisexual simply means the potential for involvement with either gender. This may mean sexually, emotionally, in reality, or in fantasy. Some bisexual people may have concurrent lovers [(just as some gay and straight people do)]; others may relate to different genders at various time periods. Most bisexuals do not need to see both genders in order to feel fulfilled.

MYTH: Bisexuals cannot be monogamous.

TRUTH: Bisexuality is a sexual orientation. It is independent of a lifestyle of monogamy or non-monogamy. Bisexuals are as capable as anyone of making a long-term monogamous commitment to a partner they love. Bisexuals live a variety of lifestyles, as do gays and heterosexuals.

MYTH: Bisexuals can hide in the heterosexual community when the going gets tough.

TRUTH: To "pass" for straight [or gay] and deny your bisexuality is just as painful and damaging for a bisexual as it is for a gay. Bisexuals are not heterosexual and we do not identify as heterosexual.

MYTH: Bisexuals are not gay.

TRUTH: We are part of the generic definition of gay (see Don Clark's Loving Someone Gay). Nongays lump us all together. Bisexuals have lost their jobs and suffer the same legal discrimination as other gays.

MYTH: Bisexual women will dump you for a man [; bisexual men will dump you for a woman].

TRUTH: Women who are uncomfortable or confused about their same-sex attraction may use the bisexual label [just as men may]. True bisexuals acknowledge both their same-sex and opposite-sex attraction.

Both bisexuals and gays are capable of going back into the closet. People who are unable to make commitments may use a person of either gender to leave a relationship.

MYTH: Bisexuals spread AIDS to the lesbian and heterosexual communities.

TRUTH: This myth legitimizes discrimination against bisexuals. The label "bisexual" simply refers to sexual orientation. It says nothing about sexual behavior. AIDS occurs in people of all sexual orientations. AIDS is contracted through unsafe sexual practices, shared needles, and contaminated blood transfusions. Sexual orientation does not "cause" AIDS.

From Biotypes, a cartoon by B. Weise and C. Smelser:

Reactions to a Bisexual Woman Coming Out:

Her Lesbian Friends: "Internalized homophobia won't allow you to accept your lesbianism."

Her Straight Friends: "Your interest in women is an attempt to avoid your fear of intimacy with men."

Her Mother: "You're sick."

CHANTS FOR BIS!

by Sharia of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network

We are bis, we're not confused!

We love whomever we choose!

Lezzies 'n' faggots 'n' bis, oh my!

Lezzies 'n' faggots 'n' bis, oh my!

GAY AND LESBIAN COUPLES

To be a part of graduate thesis. Primary focus is study of Gay and Lesbian Couples, their efforts toward acceptance in various aspects of everyday living.

CONFIDENTIALITY ADHERED TO IN ALL ASPECTS

Requirements of couples for participation:
* Willingness to be honest in all responses.

* Approximately five hours of your time for completing questionnaire & possible phone call follow up (I will pay phone charges).
* Couple has been together for at least one year (not necessarily living together).

Interested couples should contact Mitch at [redacted] or write R. A. Mitchell, [redacted] Jamaica Plain, MA before September.

NEWS FROM LOCAL GROUPS

NASHVILLE AFFIRMATION -- Nashville Affirmation meets monthly at Edgehill UMC. May 22 will focus on the Atlanta Lesbian Conference; June 26 on Lambda Communications. For additional information phone [REDACTED].

FRESNO AFFIRMATION -- Fresno Affirmation meets weekly on Sunday evening. Recent events have included a game night, Homosexuality and Christian Trivia, and a potluck and planning meeting. For additional information call [REDACTED].

AFFIRMATION METRO NEW YORK -- Upcoming events include participation by marching on Gay Pride Day and a Pool Party in July. There will be a book study this Fall on Hidden From History by Martin Duberman. For information about meetings and activities call [REDACTED].

PORTLAND AFFIRMATION FELLOWSHIP -- Confidential Support Group for United Methodists. Meets monthly. For additional information write [REDACTED], Portland, OR [REDACTED].

SOUTHEAST IDAHO AFFIRMATION -- Meets monthly. Meetings are confidential but open to whomever is struggling with issues around homosexuality. Call [REDACTED] or write [REDACTED] Pocatello, ID [REDACTED].

AFFIRMATION OKLAHOMA -- Just celebrated five years of history April 27 with a potluck and special worship service. Membership includes lay and clergy, homosexual and heterosexual persons. Upcoming plans include marching in Gay Pride Parade on June 23. For additional information write to [REDACTED] Oklahoma City, OK [REDACTED] or call Richard at [REDACTED].

CENTRAL VIRGINIA AFFIRMATION -- Meetings are held 2nd and 4th Mondays, 7:30 p.m. at Pace Memorial UMC, 700 West Franklin St., Richmond, VA. Meetings alternate between programs and worship services. For information call [REDACTED] or write to [REDACTED] Richmond, VA [REDACTED].

DALLAS AFFIRMATION -- Dallas Affirmation often has events happening at least twice a week. The group attended Grace UMC for their morning worship service recently. Horse back riding, a quilting bee, brunch and book discussions have been offered to

those interested members. For additional information write [REDACTED], Dallas, TX [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

AFFIRMATION OF WYOMING CONFERENCE -- A worship service is held every Sunday at 7:00 p.m. in the narthex of Tabernacle UMC, 83 Main St., Binghamton, N.Y. This group has been growing steadily with new faces every week. For additional information write [REDACTED], Binghamton, NY [REDACTED] or call Peggy at [REDACTED].

AFFIRMATION OF CAPE COD -- Starting in May, the meetings will be held on the last Friday of the month, with potluck supper at 6:30 p.m., worship at 7:30 and program or discussion at 8 p.m. During the supper hour the book Taking A Chance On God by John McNeil will be discussed. For information call George at [REDACTED].



DOCUMENTING OUR WITNESS: AFFIRMATION ARCHIVES

For over sixteen years Affirmation has made an eloquent and courageous witness to the United Methodist Church and to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community. Future generations seeking a model of true Christian community will be able to look back and find in the Affirmation Archives documentation of our witness and community.

However, the Archives needs your help. Dr. Kenneth Rowe, Professor of Church History and librarian at the Methodist Archives and History Center at UM-related Drew University, Madison, N.J., is the Affirmation Archivist. He is seeking a complete file of the minutes of meetings and correspondence of officers or anything else concerning Affirmation since the inception of its predecessor organizations in 1972.

He also seeks histories of each local group beginning with our first, Kansas City in 1975, through Tulsa in 1991.

Under the terms of the Archives, individual donors and groups may specify whether donations are on temporary loan or permanent gift as well as who may have access to them.

Please help us document the history of our witness by contacting Tim at [REDACTED] if you have any contributions.

P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204

DEADLINE FOR FALL NEWSLETTER

IS AUGUST 1ST!

ALL MATERIAL MUST BE IN BY THAT DATE!

PLEASE SEND TO NEWSLETTER, C/O AFFIRMATION OF [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] HYANNIS, MA [REDACTED].

The Fall Newsletter will be mailed August 24.
Deadline for the Winter Newsletter is November 1st.

Affirmation Pledge Commitment

I want to be part of Affirmation's expanding ministry to and among gay men, lesbians and bisexuals. You can count on me for the following support:

☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$_____ (please specify)

You can expect my contribution:

☐ annually ☐ quarterly ☐ monthly

Name _____

Address _____

Home Phone _____

Return to:

National Affirmation
P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204